WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2004 Vol. 25 No. 1

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members:
Lyn Hamilton, Glenise Moors *pro tem.*, Rob Moors and there are 4-6 vacancies!!

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has two active sub-groups:

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizen Building.

Front Cover:
Here is a picture of the surface of Mars...just kidding.

This photo, taken by Clive Fisher, shows the external construction of 'forecaster ants'. They are sometimes called that because their raised entrances to their underground nests will presumably be able to stop flooding by impending rain. Does anybody know anything about these ants? Why not write a small article for the next edition of *Whirrakee*?

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 25, No.1, January/February 2004

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
Welcome to 2004, a leap year which is supposed to bring all of us more luck than usual (it's true – it has worked for me already). Although there is no specific speaker advertised for the first general meeting of the year, we usually invite people to share their slides with us. If you have been somewhere interesting or have some interesting slides form around the house or garden, please bring them along.
Two submissions are mentioned in this issue and I want to acknowledge Stuart Fraser and Stan Pelczynski for their hard work behind the scenes to get those in. The committee is always keen on getting other people involved in this sort of activity. If you feel strongly about something or are just curious about the process - there is sure to be a committee member involved in a submission. Just contact the secretary to find out what is presently being done.

December General Meeting - Speaker Chris Tzaros: Birds of the Box -Ironbark Forest

Author: Sabine Wilkens

It was wonderful having Chris Tzaros speak to the Club. For many members who have known Chris since his teenage years, it felt like he was home again, and Chris also expressed such sentiments...and what better occasion than our annual Christmas get-together? The speaker attracted a big crowd and spirits were high.
Chris had decided to present us with a selection of his favourite bird images, some were taken by him and some by a friend, Ted Shimba.
The Regent Honeyeater started the show. This species which is probably on top of the wish-list for many field naturalists, is confined to the far-eastern part of the Chiltern National Park. Even though we now have newly created conservation reserves, their usefulness may be limited in protecting this species as most birds occur on private land.
Birds like the Mallee Fowl and emu are rare in the Box-Ironbark forest, the Wedderburn/ Wychitella reserve being their only known natural home for the former while it is an area near Stawell for the latter.
When the Swift Parrots came on there was a murmuring in the crowd (Chris is known to have done a lot of work following this species). There are only about 2500 birds left and many populations benefit from the newly created reserves (the St Arnaud-Rushworth are being of utmost importance). For their foraging sites, this bird, as well as species like the Little Lorikeet, Yellow-bellied Robin and many others depend on gullies, low-lying areas and drainage lines along which the vegetation is more lush and the trees are bigger and which thus represent a more reliable source of nectar.
Then the images just zoomed past...
Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Barking Owl, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Brown Treecreeper... many of these depend on mature growth habitat also as drought refuges.
Other species depend on ridge habitats, particularly those that forage for insects, for example the Scarlet Robin, Buff-rumped Thornbill and Spotted Quail Thrush.
Other species that most likely will benefit from the newly established parks are Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Diamond Firetail, Painted Button Quail and Dusky Woodswallow. While some forest species like the Black-chinned, Fuscous and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater are still quite common, Chris stressed that we cannot allow ourselves any complacency which might cause these to slip to a vulnerable status.

Birds who will not majorly benefit from the new parks and for whom other conservation measures exist already or must be put in place are species like the Grey-crowned Babbler (70% of birds occur on private property or roadside reserves), Hooded Robin and Jacky Winter.

The next part of the talk illustrated some of the diversity of our Box-Ironbark avifauna with images of King Parrots, Gang-Gang, Yellow-plumed, Spiny-cheeked, Black and Purple-gaped Honeyeater, Hylacola, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Southern Scrubwren.

Many birds are migrants to these forest and they come to take advantage of the winter-flowering eucalypts with their associated insect fauna. Examples of these are the Eastern Spinebill, Flame Robin, Rose Robin and Pink and Scarlet Robin.
Other species are spring or summer migrants like the Fantail and Pallid Cuckoo, Masked and White-browed Woodswallow, Rainbow Bee-eater, Gerygone, Sacred Kingfisher, Rufous Songlark, Leaded Flycatcher and White-throated Warbler.

At the end of the talk, Chris returned to images of the Regent Honeyeater. There are only about 1500 individuals left, and in the wild this species is critically endangered.
It is the symbol of the plight of the birds of the Box-Ironbark Forests, many of which any are endangered, declining, and vulnerable.
Chris finished the talk by expression his hope to be able to report on the recovery of the Regent Honeyeater at his next presentation.

This was a fantastic visual journey through the avifauna of the box-ironbark forest, much of which remains unseen by the casual observer. The new conservation parks will obviously go a long way in helping in the conservation of many bird species. However, more knowledge about the ecology of the birds of the Box-Ironbark is needed to help protect all species. Chris will contribute to this new knowledge in a big way.

Thanks, Chris for coming to talk to the club at a busy time of the year – the occasion was perfect!

Get Real, Bendigo City

by Peter Ellis

This is a copy of the actual letter sent to the Bendigo Advertiser and published in December

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When I was about 10 years old, say 1956, my parents were the licensees of the Sandhurst Hotel which was on the site presently occupied by the Municipal buildings on the corner of St Andrew's Av. and Lyttleton Terrace. (Just opposite the back of the Town Hall). My dad had bought for nine pound a professional fisherman's' hut on the Murray River at Torrumbarry. It was made of red gum slab and sealed with clay, but much of that had fallen out. We traveled up there for weekends. When his parents, my Irish grandparents retired there after grandfather working for the Bendigo Gasworks, they lined the hut with flattened beer cartons and painted them green. It was excellent insulation. They also made an arch of beer cans over the front entrance and marked the big grey box on the way in with nailed bottle tops proclaiming 'Thistledo'. At any rate we were friends with a professional fisherman further downstream, Mr. Freeman, who also trapped possums for sale of their pelts. My mother and I were rather abhorred by this practice. Sometimes there would be young in the pouch and we successfully raised some, feeding them with warm milk from an eyedropper. I can recall two twin ringtails, however one in particular, a brushtail, became the family pet, his name was 'Stickybeak'. He had the full run of the Sandhurst Hotel although sometimes had to be coaxed off the curtains, and to be deterred from running up ladies legs, a favourite pastime, he caught Mary (Black Mary a patron) in the toilet. I used to carry Stickybeak inside my shirt or jumper into town and everywhere, but generally to Coles and Woolworths. Gradually as he got older he would disappear for a night or two and then re-appear galloping down the passage. Eventually he did not return, but there were reports in the Bendigo Advertiser of a 'tame' possum appearing presumably from Rosalind Park through the skylight of the AMP building (which my mother thinks was in View St then) to be fed and at the Police Station. We somehow knew there were possums in Rosalind Park and were relieved it was probably Stickybeak who'd made the news and that he may have settled in a more appropriate home in the park and found a mate. I hadn't thought much more about the possums until in recent years when they've variously drawn attention, either through cruelty at one end of the extreme or as a bonus to visitors at the other; and then the more recent controversy over the trees.

Three or four years back my mother's cousin, Detlef von Nolting and his wife Lore and daughter Katrin visited us from Germany for the first time. At night my sister and I took them down to the park to see the possums. It was a magic moment for all us and there were so many running between the base of the trees and approaching for food. We had taken in thin slices of apple thinking this would be far more healthier than the junk food generally offered. One possum sitting on a low branch, apple in both hands could be gently touched. They were all amazed when I carefully placed my little finger at the base of its tail which it curled around my finger while continuing to eat. It was such a fantastic time we went back the following night taking my mother who at time was around 81 years of age. Well the possums have been in the park more than a few decades, at least five. I would think they have always been there, the remnant of original old trees from a creek lagoon was still in the fernery until John Beaumont (then Parks Curator) had them cut out. (I need the late Alec Stone to elaborate on that point) Whilst the present drought is the worst I've seen, there have been others. The most recent was in 1982 and earlier in 1967 and before then the mid 1950's. As far as I can see the possums have been around so long and the trees have not suffered because of them, they are still there. It is more old age and in particular the lack of water that is the plight of the trees. Like Barabara, Trish and others, I deplore what is being done in Rosalind Park with the tree guards and the waste of ratepayers money. I would need to see proper scientific documentation before I could believe it is the possums that are in any way harming the trees. Incidentally from memory, possums like roses; the roses in the conservatory grounds seem in good shape.

I don't think the possums are up to anything except from playing possum and providing a wonderful attraction to visitors and tourists. For goodness sake, get real Bendigo City!

P.S. There may be more information come to light on this topic in another edition of Whirrakee. Any further contributions are most welcome.

News from Canberra

This contribution was sent by Chris Bunn, who has moved to Canberra many years ago but has kept up his club membership and still enjoys reading his monthly Whirrakee.

Dear All
At the last annual meeting of the Canberra Field Naturalists we had an image/object/reading night. This entailed people bringing a favourite image, object, poem or quotation to the meeting and being prepared to say something about it. The night was highly successful both in unmasking people's hidden talents and for us to better appreciate the art in nature.
I have enclosed a poem and an extract from a book, which were read aloud on the night:

Egrets

Once as I travelled through a quiet evening,
I saw a pool, jet-black and mirror-still.
Beyond, the slender paperbarks stood crowding
each on its own white image looked its fill,
and nothing moved but thirty egrets wading-
thirty egrets in a quiet evening.

Once in a lifetime, lovely past believing,
your lucky eyes may light on such a pool.
As though for many years I had been waiting,
I watched in silence, till my heart was full
of clear dark water, and white trees unmoving,
and, whiter yet, those thirty egrets wading.

Judith Wright

Extract from 'Phillip of Australia'
by M Barnard Eldershaw, pp95-96
(first published in 1938)

The trees were alike; infinite variations on one theme – the eucalypt; their narrow leaves turned edge on to the sun, always moving; twinkling a little here and there; In the spring, their new red leaves flickered like flames in the sunshine. They were not individuals, but a community of trees; the final product of a long and hard selection, evolved to the country in which they grew; xerophytic, flourishing in thin soil with little water, resistant to bushfires and rising phoenix-like from their ashes. They had ousted their rivals, and only the dark, mournful Casuarinas, the Banksia tribe and a few others remained to dispute the ground with them. The eucalypts have beauty, but Phillip's men could not see it. They have a proud grace, a delicate, fugitive outline, pencilled on space, so that when the full light strikes them they seem to tremble into air. Some have the beauty of delicious, smooth trunks, all belong to an essential pattern, taking up and carrying on the torch of beauty or strangeness from one another and bearing it through a continent.
The first settlers hated the trees with irrational but not un-understandable violence. They cut them down and burned them, but still their roots inhabited the soil. They would not stay dead; they suckered. They fought the struggling crops with indigenous strength. Their wood was useless for boats; it was so heavy that it sank. It was useless for masts and for building, as it was channelled with gum and split into irregular fragments. It was good for nothing but firewood, they said; so they burned and burned, and still there were more trees hedging them in and their progress was pitifully slow. It was not only the trees. The had expected native fruits and the bush offered them none. It was sufficient to itself but made no provision for man. It had almost starved out one race – the aboriginals; and now it offered to starve out another. The bush was sinister in its monotony; it was trackless and unremembering. It closed like water over anyone who strayed into it. Men were lost within a few yards of the settlement. And it was silent. There were sounds – the laughter of the kookaburras, chatter of parroquets, other birds, the crepitation of branch on branch, of leaf on leaf – but these things were cushioned on a silence as vast as the bush. They rested on it and never penetrated it. The silence was pressed on the eardrums, pressed on the nerves. It waited; it was hostile.

Fauna Group Observations - Kangaroo Flat Botanical Gardens
26/11/03

Plains Froglet
Common Froglet
Spotted Marsh Frog
(16/12/03 Perron's Tree Frog)

White-faced Heron
Pacific Black Duck
Collared Sparrowhawk
Masked Lapwing
Crested Pigeon
Common Bronzewing
Galah
Musk Lorikeet
Eastern Rosella
Welcome Swallow
Grey-shrike Thrush
Willie Wagtail
Red Wattlebird
Blue-faced Honeyeater
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Common Myna *
Magpie-lark
Australian Magpie

Environmental Weeds

by Gordon Rowland
Indigenous Landscape Design Australia
55 Amaroo Drive, Smiths Lake
PO Box 132, Pacific Palms, NSW 2428
tel: 02 6554 4888 fax: 02 6554 4999
www.wildflowersforwildlife.com

Are your favourite garden plants nature's friends – or nature's foes?
Are they already – or are they likely to become – environmental weeds?
In *Potential Environmental Weeds in Australia*, weed expert Steven Csurhes defines environmental weeds as

"those species that have established self-propagating populations in native vegetation, terrestrial or aquatic, outside their natural range."

If you are a gardener or landscape professional who cares about our native birds and other wildlife, you may be shocked to learn that exotic garden plants can play havoc with their lives. This is because exotics largely favour introduced pests (such as the Indian Mynah bird) and robust native species, at the expense of Australia's cherished, vulnerable locals: small birds and bilbies, koalas and many, many others.

Exotic garden plants also account for 30 percent of Australia's worst environmental weeds and in recent years the addition of new weeds has more than doubled this percentage.

In *Feral Future: The Untold Story of Australia's Exotic Invaders,* biologist Tim Low reveals that between 1971 and 1995
"295 new weeds have established in Australia. Many of them (65 percent) were escaped garden plants, most of which had been in Australia for some time - the daffodil, sweet pea, cotoneaster and poinciana, for example. We can expect that most new weeds in the future will also be escaping garden plants. In other words, tomorrow's weeds are already here. . . . . Australians need to change their way of thinking about foreign plants. We should see in every species a potential weed; unless we have evidence to show it won't spread, a presumption of guilt should be applied."

Feral Future confirms the wisdom of Indigenous Landscape Design Australia's advocacy of selected indigenous plants as first choice for horticulturists, gardeners, landscape architects, designers and land managers, and to reject all but a small select minority of exotics for ornamental purposes. (In a future analysis we shall consider the aesthetic and other benefits of this policy.)

Our approach has the support of Australian Association of Bush Regenerators President, Peter Dixon, who is all too familiar with the devastating effects of environmental weeds: *"The worst exotics"* he has learned from practical experience, *"are those that naturalise in bushland and displace native vegetation."*

Many of these plants attract aggressive territorial birds such as the Pied Currawong and others, accounting for their escalating numbers, the increased dispersal of exotic weed seeds and the decline of Australia's vulnerable small bird species – fairy wrens, finches, pardalotes and others – many of which are now facing extinction.

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST(VFNC)
October 2003

"Terrestrial Vertebrate Fauna in Terrick Terrick National Park" reports on a survey undertaken in the grasslands and grassy woodlands of this park in northern Victoria. More than 1000 log refuges, natural and introduced, were checked over a period of seven months.

"Diet of Carp Larvae .... in Lakes of Western Victoria" outlines results of analysis of carp larvae diet in Lakes Colac and Modewarre over two seasons, with particular reference to the influence on plankton.

"The Rufous Bristlebird: Defining the Eastern Limit of its Range": several recent reports from near Torquay of this Otway subspecies suggest that its eastern limit stretches further than first recorded.

* * * * * * *

THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
December 2003

- Rhododendrons and azaleas....poisonous to birds?
- Habitats of outback Australia and the birds likely to be found in these.
- Baby Dreaming: an Arnhem Land outstation now welcoming visitors interested in wildlife.
- Paluma, Queensland: a birdwatcher's paradise.

* * * * * * *

PARKWATCH(VNPA)
December 2003

"Rehabilitating threatened Alpine Communities in north-east Victoria ..." describes what has been done so far to begin restoration of areas burnt in the 2003 fires. Work was carried out on Alpine moss-beds and Mountain Pygmy-possum habitat.

"What now for the Alps?" outlines the importance of the moss-covered peat bogs of the high plains in alpine ecology. They help prevent erosion of the vulnerable soils and contribute to the quality of the water in the upper reaches of many important streams in north-east Victoria.

"The VNPA at the World Parks Congress" reports on the fifth such gathering, held last September in Durban, South Africa. More than 3000 delegates attended from 140 countries.

"A hike in ... Wilsons Promontory National Park" describes a two day walk amongst the prickly heath, swamps, grass-tree and banksia plain, and granite outcrops in the remote northern wilderness zone of the Prom.

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Also received recently:

Castlemaine Naturalist(CFNC)

Ballarat Naturalist(BFNC)

Geelong Naturalist(GFNC)

Environment Victoria News

Field Nats News(FNCV)

Newsletter(Mid Murray Field Naturalists)

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News Items

Don Franklin at the Top End

By Bill Holsworth

Many members will remember Don Franklin, and almost all members will recognise his name as the senior author of *Eucalypts of the Bendigo District* (by Don Franklin, John Lindner and John Robinson, 1983). After Don left Bendigo he did some excellent research on the helmeted honeyeater before going to Darwin to continue his education. Just before Christmas he wrote to tell me that he has submitted his Ph. D. thesis on the, "Ecology of the Top End Bamboo *Bambusa arnhemica*".

One aspect of his study involved the flowering of the bamboo. The topic attracted the attention of a reporter of **The Bulletin** and a note titled "Bamboozled" was published in the 20 Jan 2004 edition of the magazine. The article recalls that every 40 to 60 years there is a mass flowering of bamboo followed by a mass die-off. You may recall the concern for the pandas in China when the bamboo species that makes up the major part of their diet all flowered and died. Understanding what co-ordinates the simultaneous flowering and die-off of widely separated populations of bamboo is an intriguing problem. Do they count the years, or is their some external cue? Don speculates that the bamboo counts the years, and an extra long wet season, or dry season, may cause the internal clock to miscount. As a result, populations in the affected area will flower and die out of synchrony with the majority of the population. We will look forward to reading his published work soon.

P.S. I have just received an e-mail from Don with the following comments:

I depart (Jan 20) on a two-month "post-doctoral" vacation to South America. I fly out tonight to Buenos Aires (via Sydney and Auckland), where I meet Christina. The following day we fly south to Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego, and from there we plan to work our way northwards through Chile to southern Peru.

I have the following 2 papers from my thesis published:

Franklin, D. C. & Bowman, D. M. J. S. (2003). Bamboo, fire and flood: regeneration of *Bambusa arnhemica* (Bambuseae: Poaceae) after mass-flowering and die-off at contrasting sites in monsoonal northern Australia. *Australian Journal of Botany* **51**, 529-542.

Franklin, D. C. (2003). Morphology and taxonomy of the Top End Bamboo *Bambusa arnhemica* F. Muell., a little-known bamboo from northern Australia. *Bamboo Science and Culture* **17**, 44-54. [<http://www.virtualherbarium.org/abs/BSCDownload.html>]

Club Receives Grant

The Fauna Study Group (formerly the Mammal Study Group) has received a City of Greater Bendigo Community Grant of $1,600 to undertake, "Pond Habitat Improvement at Kangaroo Flat Botanic Gardens".

Members of the Group will start making detailed plans for this work. All members of the Club are welcome to join the Fauna Study Group, the Bird Study Group, or any other speciality Group that is created. If you wish to create a special group discuss it with the Committee.

Position with the North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA)

Late in December the Club received a notice that the NCCMA would like members of the community to express and interest in 3 year appointments to Implementation Committees. These committees would have a primary focus on land and water management within the Loddon/Campaspe irrigation area, the Loddon/Campaspe dryland area, and the Avoca/Avon-Richardson area. An essential criterion for the selection of IC members is the ability to communicate effectively with local communities. Intending applicatant should phone Julie Bennett NCCMA, on 5448 7124. Applications will be accepted until Friday 6 February 2004, but the NCCMA Board may seek further applications after that date.

Bendigo Forest Management Area Sawlog Trials

The Dept. of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) wrote to the Club on 17 Dec. inviting us to an on-site meeting in Wellsford Forest on 14 January to explain the project. Bill Holsworth attended to represent the Club, and Stuart Fraser

attended the meeting as a representative of BDEC. There were also representatives from timber production and apiculture. The DSE would like to receive comments on their project. Members interested in contributing to the discussion should contact the Club,s committee. Details will be published in the *Whirrakee* after the Committee has carefully considered the project.

Community Advisory Committee of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council

In late November the Club was invited to send representatives to a Community Forum on 10 December but this could not be arranged in time. They sent us a packet of documents "The Living Murray" which is now in the Club,s library. The information can also be accessed on <http://www.thelivingmurray.mbdc.gov.au/>
After the Forum they sent us a list of attendees (no one identified themselves as coming from the Bendigo area). They also sent a form to be completed if we wished to be on the Community Advisory Committee mailing list. If there are Club members who would like to act as our contact, please contact Bill Holsworth, Secretary of the BFNC.

Ramsar Site Management Plans

In late October we received the *Barmah Forest Ramsar Site Strategic Management Plan,* and the *Gunbower Forest Ramsar Site Strategic Management Plan.* These documents will be in the library in February.

National Malleefowl Forum

The Club has received information and registration form for the National Malleefowl forum, to be held 6-9 February in Mildura.

The organisers have expressed their hope that as many people as possible can make it. This will be an exciting forum, hosted by the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group.
Call Ann Stokie (03) 5229 8648 or Shelley Heron (03) 9455 2217 if you would like more information.

Keep up to date on all National Malleefowl Forum information on the website:
www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

Submission to the Australian Senate References and Legislation Committee, Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

with regards to the
Inquiry into the regulation, control and management of invasive species and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Invasive Species) Bill 2002

This is just to report that the above submission exists. It was prepared in October 2003 as a joint submission by Bendigo & District Environment Council Inc. (Stan Pelczynski) and the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc. (Stuart Fraser).
The letter from the Australian Senate that acknowledged the submission stated that the above Committee has resolved to publish it and that it can thus be referred to in any public forum. If anybody wants to see the submission, please let Stan or Stuart know. I also have a copy (ed.)

Submission to the Department of Sustainability and Environment on 'Securing our Water Future , Green Paper for Discussion'

by Stan Pelczynski and Stuart Fraser
Secretary and Convener of Bendigo and District Environment Council Inc. (BDEC)
This submission was made in November 2003. Just the 'Introduction' is reproduced here. For anyone who would like to see the whole thing, the references (sorry, ran out of room) or the Green Paper itself, please contact the authors.

"For many people, conservation is primarily a philosophical issue, something you are either for or against. But conservation is not a matter f philosophy. In fact it's not really open to debate. Despite our intelligence and our technological prowess, we humans still depend utterly on intact ecosystems, both local and global ones. If those systems die, so will we" (1)
Bendigo and District Environment Council Inc (BDEC) is a non-profit organisation whose members have a special interest in the conservation of the natural environment and Australia's achievement in ecological sustainability.

When in 1788, Britain began its invasion of

Australia, this mega bio-diverse continent was owned by Peoples, who, over the least 50 000 years experience of living here, acquired an intimate knowledge of its environment. They understood that they were part of the living cosmos and hence of its ecology, and that consequently, their lives and well being depended in a reciprocal manner on the lives and well-being of all other living species, and on maintaining their interdependent balanced coexistence (2, 3, 4). They see those people who "appear not to understand that (such a) continued life on earth is 'good' to be desired and actions which enhance life (of all species) are morally right" as being mad (2).

Over the last 50 years or so, the western scientific model of the living cosmos has been converging closer and closer to the Aboriginal model.

Ecological research has shown us that "biodiversity", which includes all organisms, species, biological populations, their genetic variations, their complex assemblages of communities and ecosystems, their inter-relatedness of genes, species and ecosystems and their interactions with the physical environment, "is an essential element of life as we know it, providing humanity with food, shelter, medicine, clean air and water, fertile soils, recycling of organic matter, and emotional, psychological and spiritual well being"(5).

It has also shown us that "ecosystems", that is, complex and self-sustaining natural systems which include interactions between plants and animals and the physical environment together with the flow of energy and cycling of nutrients and water, "provide humanity with an absolutely indispensable array of services, including maintenance of the quality of the atmosphere, the amelioration of the climate, operation of the hydrological cycle (including flood control and provision of fresh water to agriculture, industry and homes), the disposal of waste, the recycling of nutrients essential to agriculture and forestry, the generation of soils, the provision of food from the seas, and maintenance of a vast genetic library from which humanity has already withdrawn the very basis of its civilisation. While these services are 'free', they would, of course, be infinitely costly to replace"(6); and that consequently "conserving biological diversity is the key to ecologically sustainable development and essential to maintaining the basic processes on which human life depends" (7).

In spite of the anthropocentric presentation and the exclusion of human species from the ecology of the cosmos, these scientific research findings could not be any clearer as to the crucial importance of the conservation of biodiversity to the well-being and long term survival of us as a human species on this earth. Cleary nothing can be more important than that which makes our life possible. This is what biodiversity does.

In view of this crucial importance of the conservation of biodiversity and the serious environmental problems we now face as a result of our past failure to take the natural environment seriously, and consequent persistence with relying on financially dominated decisions processes (8), which either completely omitted or gave too little weight to the economic value of our natural ecosystem services (9), one would expect that the Green Paper would avoid the repetition of past mistakes and so would be giving priority to the environment in all of its proposed water management cases. After all, water is crucial to the conservation of biodiversity and hence to the functioning of ecosystems which, in turn, provide water for our use.

Yet, in spite of the third of the proposed five major principles around which water management is supposed to be based, only in the case of catchments that are not over-allocated, does the Green Papaer avoid past mistakes by giving priority to the natural environment and proposing that diversion be limited by environmental needs. Nowhere does the Green Paper consider the issue of ecological sustainability of population growth and of its consequent inevitability of countering the environmental flows derived from the proposed reduction in water consumption.

Is this because the Authority responsible for the Green Paper still does not take our dependence on the natural environment seriously? We hope not and therefore call on the Authority to adopt a more realistic approach to the solution of our water problems, an approach necessarily based on objective scientific research and not on subjective economic considerations and uninformed public opinion.

Unless such an approach is adopted, ecological sustainability will never be achieved, and our quality of life will continue to degenerate.

The submission then addresses each chapter of the Green Paper in turn, ending with a conclusion in which the government is commended for addressing water management by producing this paper but hope is expressed that the whole approach to the issue is changed and that the authors' comments are taken into consideration when preparing the White Paper.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting

Wednesday, February, 11 7.30pm
For the first meeting of the year, members are encouraged to bring along slides.
Please note: slides don't have to be from exotic locations!

Bird Observers Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm. Please confirm with Kerrie Norris (ph 54478017)

Fauna Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Wednesday, February 25 7.30pm
Topic - Reporting of summer observations.
All welcome to participate.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Know your frog
The following sites both refer specifically to the Victorian frog fauna: If you intend to go to the fauna group BBQ, it might be good to look at these sites beforehand.

http://www.frogs.org.au/frogs/ is based closely upon the Frogwatch Field guide to Victorian Frogs. It has great information--photos, maps, keys, and pie charts to depict seasonal activity.

http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/collections/showcase.asp takes you to the showcase page at the Museum of Victoria. This site has links to accounts of other Victorian fauna besides frogs, including a great links to the butterflies and reptiles of Victoria. This site has bigger photos of the frogs than the other site, and longer call bites (taken from the Frogwatch tape, with introductions by Murray Littlejohn), but the sound can be slow to load up.

*****Weed Spotters Wanted!*****

To tackle potential, new and emerging weeds more effectively, the Department of Primary Industry (DPI) is developing a Weed Alert Rapid Response Plan for the State. One of its initiatives is to develop a network of weed spotters to report new weeds.

Weeds might be found in paddocks, on roadsides, in National Parks, at nurseries or the local fete or market.

To become a volunteer Weed Spotter in Victoria, send your contact details to Kate Blood at DPI, PO Box 7, Beaufort 3373 or email: Kate.Blood@dpi.vic.gov.au

Biodiversity Alliance

The Biodiversity Alliance now has a spot on the internet. It is currently being hosted by the Victorian National Parks association at www.vnpa.org.au/whatsnew/biodiversityalliance.htm

For those interested in joining the e-mail liste-server for the Biodiversity Alliance, details are included on the website.